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## Running with an “other”: landscape negotiation and inter-relationality in Canicross

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**Abstract:** In this auto-ethnographic narration, I tell the story of learning to run *with* an “other”, my canine companion ‘A’. Together we have built a routine, a conjoined habitus, connected by equipmental prosthetics and a shared history of the landscapes we have traversed. In drawing on the experiences of our journey from beginners to amateur competitors through a series of ethnographic insights, I seek to highlight the importance of thinking about significant others in sport and leisure activities. The paper highlights shifts in human and dog perception, behavior and attitude to running landscapes and concludes by arguing that, by being attentive to the influence and action of “others” in sporting contexts, we are able to discover a plethora of new and exciting calibrations of how human-landscape negotiation takes place, and indeed, what it may mean in terms of troubling traditionally defined categorizations of sporting/leisure experience, presence and responsibility.

**Keywords:** Canicross, Running, Dogs, Interrelationality, Sport, Co-Presence

### Introduction

In this auto-ethnographic narration, I tell the story of learning to run *with* an “other”. A loyal partner, unfazed by the grind of the training run. Come rain, wind, ice or snow, steep ascents fail to alter her mood, whilst mixed technical terrain, wildlife feces and advancing herds of cows excite and distract her from the task at hand. This *other* is my wolf-like hound, an intelligent, challenging and high maintenance beast, designed for endurance in Northern climes. Together we have built a routine, a conjoined habitus if you will, of running as a unit, connected by equipmental prosthetics and a shared history of the landscapes we have traversed. We are not alone, there are thousands like us, members of county clubs and local to international competitors.

*Canicross* is our sport, the pursuit of trail running in a human-dog (or even human-dog-dog) partnership, tethered together by a specifically designed dog harness, bungee lead and human waist belt. In the United States of America and Scandinavia in particular, canicross is a well-established sport that runs alongside, and as an alternative to the other “Joring”, or pulling, disciplines (ski, bike and sled), particularly during the snowless months. In these nations joring is a big enough sport (and business) to warrant specific dog breeding programmes that maximise team speed, communication and technical skill over specific distance categories (i.e. endurance vs. speed). In the United Kingdom though, where this paper originates from, the sport is a considerably less professional affair where greyhounds, huskies and dobermen line up collegially next to jack russells and labradoodles whether in canicross specific races or as grateful additions to traditionally “human-only” trail events. Hulstman (2015, p. 53) summarizes the key factors of canicross thusly,

“while handlers/runners enjoy the opportunity to have their stride increased by the dog that pulls them, dogs must learn how to follow a handler’s basic directions or injury can result if the handler is pulled off balance. Runs/trials take place on trails. A well trained dog will stay ahead of the handler, pulling steadily and avoiding distractions”.

In drawing on the experiences of our journey from beginners to amateur competitors through a series of ethnographic insights, I seek to highlight the importance of thinking about significant others in sport and leisure activities. In particular I seek to theorize the relationship between humans and the non-humans who are, if not the means by which we engage in sport and leisure activities (e.g. horse riding, agility, sled sports, birdwatching), they are at least the facilitators and motivators to take part (e.g. walking, snorkeling/SCUBA diving). Drawing on pertinent conceptual debates taking place in Human Geography and the wider humanities (Sociology, Cultural Studies and Science and Technology Studies) concerning inter-relationality and *more-than*-human engagements with landscape, I seek to stimulate discussion on the potential for bringing together prominent theoretical debates in these fields, to understudied sporting contexts and landscapes. Thus, I envisage this paper to be emblematic of what Hovorka (2017, p. 2) has termed a ‘fourth wave’ study of a more-than-human engagement with space. In other words, that the animal in question here (my dog), is not considered merely a “conceptual device to interrogate [my] human” experiences of various canicross landscapes, but rather she is a fundamental co-creator of the lived moments we share in our canicross world (Hovorka, 2017, p. 3. Work in this vein is forthcoming in the Special Issue of Leisure Studies (2019) on "Multispecies Leisure"). In order to evidence this, in this paper I highlight the newly acquired appreciation of the landscape and it’s inhabitants that we both have gained through our *combined* temporally contingent sensory affordances and mental attitudes. Whilst I cannot claim to know *how* my dog truly experiences the runscapes we have traversed, nor her mental attitude to certain triggers, encounters or stimuli, I can know that since we embarked on this journey of skill development and bonding, both of our embodied performances of running (and running together) have changed, and our understanding of each other’s character and capabilities have grown, as is reflected in our improved technique, stamina and appreciation of the sport. As such, I do not claim to understand my dog’s attitudes and behaviors through a human lens, but I do seek to elucidate the ways in which together, we craft an embodied practice that is more-than-human (Game, 2001; Haraway, 2008).

## **Geographies of Running**

To situate this paper I draw on two main bodies of existing research, socio-spatial studies of running and what Donna Haraway (2016) refers to as Science Studies, that at their nexus, offer a fruitful remit of inquiry which at present is under-developed from both a Human Geography and a Sociology of Sport perspective. Arguably this nexus is representative of a more-than-Human Geography of sport, but for the purpose of this paper I will focus specifically on running.

Whilst Bale (2000) declared that running was largely missing from academic debate, it has since received steady and increasing attention from both geographical, psychological and sociology of sport remits. However, It has been recognized that the majority of research in this area has focused on elite athletes (Bale, 2000, 2004; Bale & Sang, 2013), coaching studies (Denison, 2007; Denison & Mills, 2014; Markula & Denison, 2000; Markula-Denison, Bridel, & Denison, 2015; Mills & Denison, 2013), and from a psychological standpoint (Bramble & Lieberman, 2004; Carrier et al., 1984). That is not to say that divergence in methodological approach and intellectual foci are not evident, with better understandings of running/jogging bodies and environments coming to the fore from both elite and amateur settings. Acting as a turning point in regard to this, is the sustained and pioneering body of work published by Hockey and Allen-Collinson, touching variously as it does on themes of sensory perception, embodied awareness of pain and recovery, temporality, gender and to some degree inter-relationality (human-human) (Allen-Collinson, 2011; Allen-Collinson & Hockey, 2007, 2011, 2015; Collinson, 2003; Allen Collinson & Owton, 2015 Hockey, 2006; Hockey & Collinson, 2006). Whilst the majority of their opus focuses on their own experiences of being serious runners, much of the work presented by them can be used as a springboard both methodologically and thematically to consider running's less specialized sibling, *jogging*. Indeed, from a Human Geography perspective this is evident in the work of Cook et al. (2016) who coin the term *Jography* to encapsulate more lay understandings of mobile engagements with urban spaces. Like Hockey and Allen-Collinson's studies, Cook et al. (2016) seek to better understand the lived embodied experience of running/jogging itself and the ways in which different landscapes become known, internalized and negotiated through the locomotive means of putting one foot in front of the other. Building on the autoethnographic narrative approaches favoured by the former, the latter draw on wider methodological innovations in the social sciences to visually enhance the researcher and the reader's understanding of participant experiences of running or jogging in an urban context (Collinson, 2008; Hockey & Allen-Collinson, 2013). This wider appreciation of the social, cultural and performative aspects of running culture is also evident in the timely edited collection by Bridel et al. (2015), in which contributors focus on the historical development, meaning, and embodied experiences of endurance running in its myriad forms.

Relatedly, understanding the spatial qualities of different landscapes/spaces for running have also been deemed worthy of attention, in their own right (Hitchings & Latham; 2016). This is a significant consideration to understanding running experiences, particularly as the commercialization of movement and movement cultures seeks to commodify the practice of running and usher would be practitioners in to the cozy and generic spaces of the gym, replacing multisensory engagements with nature, with desensitizing engagements with technologies and media screens (Hitchings & Latham; 2016). Such commodification practices and their influence on the image and take up of running amongst existing and would-be practitioners is a problematic consideration as the sport/leisure activity is increasingly used unproblematically by local to national health initiatives as a tool to boost the fitness and activity levels of all sectors of the population, irrespective of

income, education and location (Barnfield, 2017; Latham, 2015; Shipway & Holloway, 2010). Moreover, the traditional medicalised separation of physical activity from the spaces and places in which it is practiced in terms of the potential health (mental and physical) benefits afforded, is something which recent academic debate is drawing attention to (for example through studies on “the green gym” and “nature on prescription”). Bringing together Geographical methods and theoretical perspectives on studying spatial qualities and affects alongside Sport Studies’ attention to movement cultures generally, but specifically concerning running seems pertinent.

Whilst the above overview of academic attention on running illustrates a gain in its momentum, to date there lacks any overt attempt to consider more-than-human engagements with runscapes. That is not to say that, writers have evaded the topic of interrelationality entirely, for it subtly seeps into the fabric of many of the analyses presented above. And, indeed, as a subset of interrelationality, a focus on human-human interaction *is* evident, particularly in the co-training practices and experiences of Hockey and Allen Collinson (Collinson, 2008; Hockey & Allen-Collinson, 2013) and also in Edensor and Larsen’s (2018) and Hindley’s (2018) consideration of the shared and ruptured rhythms of embodied action that typify marathon and Parkrun’s<sup>i</sup> settings respectively. However, these studies are not conceptualized as more-than-human, and are not mobilizing the case of running to demonstrate how it can serve as a vehicle to foster interspecies world making or what Haraway has recently (2016) called, *string figures*. Thus, an opportunity arises here, to delve into the *Terrapolis* of canicross:

“Terrapolis is rich in world, inoculated against posthumanism, but rich in com-post, inoculated against human exceptionalism but rich in humus, ripe for multi-species story-telling” (Haraway, 2016, p. 11).

Mobilizing canicross in this way then, seeks to further theorise the landscape of *sporting* experience generally and of *running* specifically. Furthermore, whilst the multi-species figurehead in the sport of canicross, the human-dog(-dog), is an overt and easily defined sporting assemblage, the narrative presented in this paper is argued to be representative of the less visible and subtle interspecies engagements that take place during sporting activity more generally. As such, this paper should not be seen as an isolated example transferable to a few other choice sporting practices (e.g. horse riding, agility), but rather it can be considered as a particularly knotty nexus of wider debates that infiltrate many everyday (especially outdoor) sporting experiences and engagements with space. It is hoped that, by moving beyond the re-telling of personal experience, a picture may start to be drawn as to the wider geographical, cultural and experience specific practices that are constructed as significant within the sporting practice of canicross.

## **Methods**

This paper is based on a period of 10 months of ethnographic research of apprenticeship in the sport of canicross, from September 2017 to June 2018. This

period marks the intensification of our (my dog, henceforth labeled 'A', and I) engagement with the sport from occasionally running together to training and competing in a trail marathon set in the Brecon Beacons National Park, Wales. In our journey from casual co-joggers to competitive runners, we have encountered and overcome obstacles (literally and figuratively) that have shaped our understandings of each other, and in turn the conditions of our future exploration of sporting landscapes and communities. The quotes that furnish this paper derive from post-run journal entries that aimed to capture as much detail regarding the run as possible. These journal entries include our moods, the quality of our communication (more-than-linguistic), our sensory engagement with the surrounding landscape, our team's sporting skill (or lack thereof) and, where relevant, the actions of other canicrossers, wildlife, dog walkers, pedestrians etc. The aim here is to explore what it is possible for dogs and humans to learn about each other through co-operative action in sport. The timings of the entries were essential to capturing fresh recollections and immediate sensations, as well as more considered and reflective attitudes to, and experiences of, taking part in the sport of canicross. Attuning oneself to the complexities of experience is a difficult and highly reflexive task (Anderson, 2006). The written accounts presented below are not intended to represent an 'accurate' or all encompassing explanation of all that each run involved and called forth emotionally and sensorily. Instead they are summarized and somewhat ordered accounts of a messy and complex experience. The accounts seek to convey an essence of what took place and the dominant moments of sensory and affective awareness which struck me. As such, it is hoped that the reader may 'enter the subjective world of the teller—to see the world from his or her point of view' (Plummer, 2001, p. 401). My perspective is one of an average (in terms of race results), amateur, but relatively regular, white, 33 year old female competitor in generic running and canicross specific events, of both large and small scales. The personal narrative presented below is interspersed with theoretical reflections and links to other authors' experiences of negotiating their way around runsapes and/or their elucidations of working across traditionally demarcated species boundaries.

### **Learning to run together**

Over time I have learnt that the human and the dog do not focus on the same things when running, but that through running, tethered together, both begin to appreciate to a lesser or greater degree, some elements of the experience that are important or noteworthy to the other. As a lone human runner, I run and look around in search of 3 main elements, (1) nature's beauty, (2) I scan the ground and the landscape to determine its runability (terrain/gradient/obstacles) and (3) I look out for threats to the ongoing pursuit of running and/or my safety (cars/cows/stranger danger). Indeed these ways of seeing, are reflected in the experiences of single species running in wider academic literature (Allen-Collinson & Hockey, 2015; Collinson, 2008; Cook et al., 2016). By contrast, when A is given space to run (untethered) she looks for (in conjunction with her other senses) (1) things/beings to play with, (2) food, (3) threats to our safety, and probably a subset of all of the preceding points (4) beings to hunt down. When we run together these elements are not simply combined, but their potencies in each of us are compromised and transformed. I still

seek to appreciate beautiful views as I run but I see things differently. Livestock is no longer a “cute” distraction but a hassle, as cows approach and sheep scatter. The former offer a threat to our safety, whilst our woolly figurehead and foreboding speed intimidate the latter. For me, hills are not as physically daunting as they once were, whereas downhill sections are actually more of a challenge (I get pulled up but I also get pulled down!).

Allen-Collinson (2008), articulates the stress of encountering “others” on a run, and paints a negative image of dog (and their human), youth, selected male and drinking communities, derived from personal experiences of unpredictable behavior, harassment and even abuse. Stranger danger is no longer a concern for me (you’d have to be a brave soul to attempt to harass a human strapped to a 30kg wolf-like dog). However, for A, the combination of being restrained and of being in close proximity to her human, leaves her both vulnerable and protective, and as such she can be extra wary of characters who do not appear/behave in line with her accepted bank of modes of being. Additionally, for both of us, other dogs present an enhanced threat or unpredictability as they can be more reactive when they are not familiar with our visually “different” equipment. As an “owner” of a relatively disobedient hound, who occasionally runs alone and who regularly walks and runs with said hound, it would be hypocritical of me to attribute the same level of resentment to those other beings who populate both urban and rural runscapes as Allen-Collinson (2008) does, for I have cringed with shame as A bounds up to passing joggers seeking to initiate play just as I have been circled and snapped at by a territorial Jack Russell. However, I do concede that, in their unpredictability, their very presence does complicate and present obstacles to running, both as an individual but even more so to a human-dog assemblage. Importantly though these human-centric interpretations of “threat” to activity and safety are mirrored in the actions and avoidance tactics of A too. As we gain more experience, A seeks to engage with other dogs to a lesser extent, she *largely* focuses on the trail and its vicinity rather than distant beings (as she would on an off lead walk), she is calm and sedate amongst large groups of canicrossers, differentiating a dog in harness from the play potential offered by a dog on the loose.

These subtleties in perception differentiation between our off-lead walking attitudes and behaviours versus our conjoined canicross habitus, are increasingly also further segmented into “racing” and “training” modes of running together. Just as I get nervous, prepare more diligently and push my body harder for races, familiar landscapes on race days can instill in A focus and drive—she runs faster, pulls harder and is distracted less, as the following diary excerpt illustrates:

*We drive to the event, a local 10km trail race on the edge of the Cotswolds and the city of Bath. The event is not canicross specific, but rather a “human” race with a canicross time trial that begins well before the human field. It is January with a temperature of about 5 degrees, not taking in to account the wind chill. I stay in the car for as long as I dare before kitting up A and heading to the race registration and briefing. Eventually we are called to the starting chute, and the cold but collegial*

*atmosphere shifts to one of tension and anticipation. The dogs all sense the occasion, many bark incessantly with excitement, some glaze over and enter another state, ears pinned back, they have a job to do and they are focused. Others become visibly nervous, shaking with the overwhelming racket of barking and movement in a contained space. Luckily for me, A falls into the second category, placid but wise, she sticks close to me and occasionally looks me in the eye, waiting for her cues for action. One by one, at 10 second intervals the human-dog teams are called forward to the start line. Each team counted down "5-4-3-2-1, GO! GO! GO!!!". Some teams "get it" with dogs straining, wheezing and springing hard off the line to canter from the off, miraculously launching their human into the first 50m of the course with an exaggerated cadence. Others are overwhelmed by the situation or even unwilling to play the game. One dog goes backwards, another starts to initiate play. Today there are no face plants (human) or cats cradle scenarios, thanks to the staggered start, but the human-dog team is still reliant on both parties bringing their 'A' game to the race. For today at least, we appear to be "on form".*

The above extract both serves to highlight our shared understanding of the "correct" and most fruitful way of being in a race scenario, but the actions of other human-dog teams also highlight the fact that such a state of conjoined focus is not guaranteed, and indeed is something which is fine tuned through shared practice. This shared practice and experience is what permits our improved reading of the landscape in terms of our joint understanding of how to negotiate both the social conventions of canicross (e.g. race traditions, rules, sharing space with others) as well as the material layout and texture of the trail itself (e.g. when to push hard, when to ease the pace).

As noted previously, thinking for and with an "other" is something which has been explored in a running context even if only in relation to working with other humans. Parallels in thought do exist, and just as Collinson and her running partner denote the build up of their shared understandings of each other's capacities through repeated action, so have A and I gathered "knowledge of the other in relation to a whole series of indicators of running-being" (Collinson, 2008, p. 53). Through visual cues I have learnt to determine the extent of her effort. It is easy to assume that a large dog has power and stamina that far outweigh human capabilities, and whilst for A and I this is true, dogs are much more likely to exercise to dangerous levels of exertion than humans, especially if being encouraged to exercise by their human in warm conditions.

Over time I have built a stock of references from which to draw upon and manage our running effort in accordance with these. Through shared running experience I know that when A repeatedly turns to look at me, she is trying to communicate something. Not necessarily tiredness, but sometimes boredom or frustration at being tethered—in the case of the latter such glances are also accompanied by a gentle mouthing of my hand to initiate a play fight. If she is beginning to tire, she will



slow her pace and jog next to me but still maintain a forward looking stance, a medium pant and pricked up ears. This state, whilst common towards the end of a training run, does not necessarily indicate a point of steady demise in effort, but can also represent a temporary period of fatigue. If she is struggling however, she will shift down a gear and walk and turn her face to mine repeatedly seeming to question how long we have left, or potentially questioning why we are exerting ourselves to such a degree at all. Her tongue offers another indicator of the effort she is putting in to the run—unless sedentary, she nearly always pants, but when she is pushing her body extra hard (running or playing), her tongue can appear distended and take on a life of its own as it lolls slimily and rhythmically to one side. Depending on availability, I can also gauge her fatigue/hydration based on how often she stops to drink from puddles or during a race, whether she makes the most of water stops and aid/drinks stations. It is sometimes difficult to gauge her efforts, as some of these “tells” are also evident when she is excessively excited by a scenario, even if on fresh legs (as the example of running in pheasant season, presented below, illustrates). However, when considered alongside landscape characteristics (especially gradient), weather conditions (especially temperature), and by drawing on the bank of knowledge of her previous performance, I feel confident that I can determine when it is safe for her to run, and in what circumstances. This is not a unidirectional awareness of effort and pace management, although arguably my gestures of communication are more overt in their incitement of a response.

A is also aware of *my* limitations and she adjusts her efforts accordingly (unless there are other beings to be hunted/chased). Through training she has learnt to respond to my voice commands—“wait” and “heel” are routine sounds of a steep or uneven descent. Similarly “go, go”, “pull” and “find Chris (A’s male human)”, make up the soundscape of a sprint to the finish line or an uphill section where her dog power is particularly needed to take up the slack of my fading motivation and energy. On long and steady runs the ebbs and flows in our effort often go without verbal recognition, other than subtle reinforcements of positive action such as “good girl” as she digs in and pulls me through weary patches, and “come on, Bear” as I reciprocate as pace setter when she loses focus on the common goal. Indeed, the following diary extract illustrates the kind of effort (often “failed”) and practice with which this co-relational understanding has been crafted:

*Today’s training run had a goal, now we have a relatively steady “pull”, I wanted to focus our efforts on direction. I have noticed that A pulls more steadily and with more focus when we are running through wooded trails or clearly demarcated paths. When we reach a junction she either turns to me for instruction or picks the most overtly demarcated path that is visible to her (unless sheep, rabbits, dogs or birds etc. are within viewing range). Open fields however seem to distract her, she often repeatedly turns to look at me seeking reassurance or instruction, slowing her pace to run next to me, or she will initiate play mannerisms (bowing down, picking up sticks or clumps of grass, mouthing at my hand etc.). For some reason I thought that being able to instruct A on “left”, “right” and “keep going” would help with this issue. Maybe one day it will, but for the*

*moment all I have done is confuse her further. Laden with a pocket full of chicken, today we set out across the fields and at random intervals I pulled against our flow of movement to initiate a change in our direction. At the same time I shouted said direction ("left" or "right") and waited for her to realize what was happening, before rewarding her with chicken. Unfortunately the lure of the chicken was too much for her, the whole activity was lost on her and she spent the entire time running next to my leg trying to get the chicken out of my pocket. Worried that I had accidentally taught her to heel (and undone all of our pull training) I gave her all of the chicken to get rid of the smell and gave up on the directions. She returned to a minimal and distracted pull after this, occasionally looking back at me or running next to me mouthing at my chicken scented hand. No more food rewards during canicross training!*

The man made path is an interesting point of reference here, it is created and maintained by regular human action, the wearing away of grass down to mud by walkers, the hedge trimming practices of public rights of way officers, the gravelling or tarmacking of foot and cycle paths within "urban nature" settings. These all demarcate and standardize the walking/running experience that as humans we think little about and rarely seek to transgress. Indeed, when trail running, leaving "the trail" literally signifies being "off course", or even lost. We tend to assume that dogs lack a critical understanding of what such landscape features represent: we tether them with leads or keep them under our spell with voice commands, in bid to limit the distance from which they may stray from the path. Often, we assume that companion animals interpret "oriented-objects" such as paths or trails differently to humans, but here we can see that without guiding instruction from a human, dogs too can seek comfort and meaning from the trail, with its presence verifying their choice in directional motion. I cannot assume that A chooses to follow man made paths when canicrossing for her own benefit (she certainly doesn't during an off-lead walk). However, as a tethered being, A may at the very least be aware that she is controlling the direction of her human (who always seeks to stick to the trail), and as such can derive that as the team leader (in the sense that she is out in front), she has more chance of maintaining fluidity and onward motion when doing so on a clearly demarcated path. This analysis is echoed in the work of Laurier et al., which similarly highlights the role of habit forming practices in the daily routine of dog walking. Path's it is argued, form "a shared historical territory for both: the paths, traversed daily [...are] known for their length, their junctions, lampposts, views, scenting opportunities, and so on" (Laurier et al., 2006, p. 9). In teaching A to pull steadily, this routine and familiarity was essential to building her confidence to be the leader of the team. For roughly three months we ran the same two routes between 2 and 5 times per week. As we progressed I re-introduced directional training exercises that shifted in approach from the one depicted above. Instead of initiating a turn with counter force and a food reward, the new approach involved running along bendy paths, vocalizing our action with "good left" and "good right", progressing to junctions where I would ultimately (months later) give the command "left" or "right" as we approached.

Adapting teaching techniques and choosing landscapes to suit our combined learning needs, illustrates a more than verbal “reading” of each other’s intent and desires, in order to achieve an efficient and sustainable running practice that is recognized as *canicross* rather than *chaos*. Furthermore, it could be argued that a soundscape, such as the one depicted above, of human voiced verbal commands, may seem to reinforce a traditional understanding of the human (masterful) —dog (subservient) relationship. However, our training and race experiences offer many examples of a subversion of this relationship, as the following two extracts illustrate:

*Bournemouth Park Run was this morning. A new one to us. We started near the front, but to the side. On the sound of the starting air horn, A was amazing. She immediately launched in to a gallop, heaving me from a standstill to a sprint in what seemed like milliseconds. Within the first 40m we were in the top 10, going at an unsustainable yet very satisfying pace. And then, from nowhere, she stopped dead, runners piling up behind us, arched her back and pooped for what felt like an eternity. By the time she had finished and I had cleared up the situation, we were firmly back in our usual spot in the field.*

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*I have no knees left. Today we ran 10 KM up on Lansdown. It is apparently pheasant season (this information was not on my register until today). The scent of these birds must act as some sort of stimulating drug to A. We only saw one pheasant and heard a few more cackle in the distance (or at least that was all I could hear), but she pulled so hard the whole way round. Her whole running style was different today, she is normally a trotter—ears pinned back with a steady rhythm. I don’t tend to hear her breathing but today she sounded like she was being suffocated to the rhythm of her stride. Her motion was more akin to a gallop, with her stride jarringly interrupted by the anchor like figure of me bouncing around behind her, resisting her progress. Her nose was to the ground and her ears were pricked up. It seems we were both on the hunt. I had always hoped that she might learn to pull harder as we ran together more, but now I’m not so sure my hips, back and knees could take the impact. We were not a team today, if she didn’t know the route off by heart who knows where we would have ended up, for I had no say in the matter! There was no communication from either party, I tried to instruct her to “wait” and “heel”, if only for a few seconds of rest, but I was granted neither. I couldn’t even get her to look at me, she was so “in the zone”. By the time we got back to the car she looked deranged, tongue lolling excessively from the side of her mouth, eyes still in some sort of unbreakable trance. We smashed our Strava segment time for the downhill section before the sheep track. In fact we were 4<sup>th</sup> fastest for the year to date! I played no part in this minor victory.*

Laurier et al. (2006) note that it is the dogs who tend set the pace in the human-dog walking team. The above journal extracts are a somewhat extreme reification of this sentiment. Although it is the human who decides that canicross is the activity that the team will take part in, along with the destination and timing of the practice, the dog can bring their own agenda to the mix. Personally, unaware of the smells and distant sounds emitted by these pheasant birds, I gained a new appreciation of the potency of the scent(s) they leave behind. Distant clucks and cackles resulted in our increased forward momentum, felt instantly in my waist. With our cadence and stride width increased, my own appreciation of the landscape shifted. From a leisurely appreciation of distant hilltop views to a nearby, frenetic search for suitable sections of trail to plant each strike of the foot. Rocks, plant roots, uneven dried mud fissures quickly entering and leaving my consciousness as I tried to match the pace of a four legged hound who needs not concern herself with balance. For Burke et al. (2004, p. 174) this kind of experience is emblematic of “understanding how both human and animal are engaged in mutual decision-making, to create a kind of choreography, a co-creation of behavior”. This co-created choreography has its own political nuances and fluctuating power hierarchies, and it is constantly at the whim of a changing landscape both in terms of form, and meteorological conditioning.

The previous examples highlight the agency and power afforded to a non-human being, within the confines of what is essentially a sport organized and opted into by human decision-making. Moments like this tough, are not rare and isolated, rather they fold into the overall practice of living, training and exercising with non-human companion species, as the following excerpt illustrates:

*It's 7 a.m. Sunday morning and I wake up groggy and with an underlying sense of annoyance, such is the norm for a parent with a toddler who has yet to learn to sleep through the night. From downstairs I can hear the tapping of dog claws on a laminate floor, as A goes through her stretching routine in time to appear perky and excited at the first sight of human company. Today is a race day and I am not in the mood. Deprived of sleep and energy and with a weather forecast of rain and biting winds, today feels not like “my” day. A is keen; for food, for the toilet, for an outing, I'm yet to find out which. 07:10 AM is too early for a dog chasing it's tail to evoke an empathetic reaction in its human, even less cute when she starts clawing impatiently with her large talons at my arm, to cajole me into action. As I eat my breakfast on the sofa, some loud clanging ensues as a she pushes a large stainless steel dog bowl around the floor. She's no fool, she knows what should be hers. This is a common performance at the weekend when the weekday routine of dog walk and food by 07:30 AM is jarringly interrupted for two whole days, leaving her confused and expectant. Ignoring her, I disappear to get dressed and re-appear 10 minutes later in running clothes. She reads the signs. She gets it: this won't be a walk—I'm wearing the wrong uniform, it will be a run. As much as I would like it to be so, running is not her favourite activity, walking is better—more time for play, more off lead freedom to disobey and explore. But, it is better than being at home. And so, as I lace up my*

*trainers by the front door, I am joined by my partner, tail wagging and toes tapping.*

Invitations to action, it is argued are not solely within the remit of the human (Goode, 2007; Laurier et al., 2006). Here A presents a number of invitations to action. Chasing her tail she is telling me that she is bored and wants to go out, and pushing her bowl around the floor tells me that she is hungry and wants feeding. Whilst canicross may not be her intention in this excerpt, she is inviting me to entertain her and that is what drives me to overcome feelings of lethargy and hostility to bad weather, and turn up at the race. Without my companion I would have probably given up running by now (as I have done numerous times in the past, before she became part of our family), and moved on to another sport as is evidenced by the graveyard of sporting equipment that is our garage. However, A doesn't care if it is a cold January morning (although she does care if it is a hot August afternoon!), she demands to expel energy and engage her senses in an interactive environment. This level of accountability to the exercise demands of an other is what has driven me to train in all weathers, to take on increasingly challenging landscapes and to gain a new appreciation of the sensation of movement at speed, through technically difficult terrain. As a result, we are both closer, happier and healthier.

## **Conclusion**

As Goode (2007) has called for, here I have sought to articulate that the canicross context serves as an example for humans to engage with canine companions in sport, in a way that treats them as more than “biological machinery”, i.e. a source of additional power, speed and endurance. Whilst we may never truly be able to access the “inner” experience of our canine companions, just as we won't for human companions, we can still “coordinate action with them” and share a simultaneous sense of effort and reward (Laurier et al., 2006, p. 5). As Fletcher and Platt (2018, p. 3) argue “dogs, then, are both agents and companions [... in activity] not objects to be moved. In this sense, humans and animals are united in a shared ontology.”

As an introduction to thinking about multispecies cooperation, action, care and understanding in sport and leisure scenarios, this paper is not intended to be all encompassing, but rather evocative of the myriad types of interrelational connection that can be fostered. By learning a new skill together, my companion animal and I have learnt to engage with landscapes and other beings in new, exciting and challenging ways. We have gained *an* understanding of each other's capacities and potential, sensory registers, fears and exhilaration. Our interpretation of intent may not be *the* direct experience of the other, but through practice and shared experience, what we do share makes sense to each of us as we become increasingly familiar with what canicross looks, feels and represents to us as a singular multispecies unit, constantly negotiating the world around us. As the examples presented above articulate, I do not claim that we have “become one”, morphed in focus and ability, to reach a singular common goal (although on good day it may temporarily feel like that for me). However, what I do claim, is that we are no longer

what we were before, and that we have become canicross runners together in a powerful cats cradle of success and failure, anecdote and routine, frustration and joy (Haraway, 2008),.

Whilst thinking in this way is not new in itself, in relation to sport and leisure landscapes there is a notable lack of application of such hybrid or inter-relational approaches to study. Indeed as Hovorka (2017, p. 2) has noted, “sub-disciplinary engagement *beyond* human geography” is needed in order to push disciplinary boundaries in “fourth wave” conceptualisations of hybridity. Thus, pushing relatively well rehearsed debates that populate the discipline of Human Geography (and indeed Cultural Studies and Science and Technology Studies before it), into the well trodden landscapes that feature in the empirical pages of Sociology of Sport and Leisure papers, is hoped to be one such way of pushing such disciplinary boundaries.

At this point it seems pertinent to address *why* it is important to think about multispecies interrelationality, and indeed human-human interrelationality more generally, in sport and leisure contexts. Both Human Geography and Sociology of Sport and Leisure share at their core a desire to better understand how humans negotiate their way through distinct landscapes. If we begin to augment the well used inventory of humanist methods “with those that amplify corporeal registers” (Hovorka, 2017, p.3), to include approaches and theorizations that are sensitive to the influence and action of “others”, then we are likely to discover a plethora of new and exciting calibrations of how this landscape negotiation takes place and indeed what it may mean in terms of troubling traditionally defined categorizations of experience, presence and responsibility (Haraway, 2003; Lorimer, 2010).

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<sup>i</sup> Parkrun organize free, weekly, timed 5km runs in park/beach/woodland locations around the world.